



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by Head of OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 2, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Urstad, the United States would like to join others in enthusiastically welcoming you here in Vienna to your first appearance before the Permanent Council. We are delighted with your selection as Head of Mission and look forward to working with you in the coming months and years.

We believe the Mission will benefit enormously from the extensive experience and knowledge of Serbia and Montenegro that you gained as Norway's ambassador to Belgrade over the past five years. At the same time, Mr. Ambassador, I think you will find you have inherited an excellent, experienced and highly motivated staff.

We think it is also fair to say that you have inherited a Mission that has established a solid record of cooperation with partners at all levels -- with the governments of both republics, with State Union authorities, and with non-governmental organizations and civil society representatives.

All of this is fortuitous given the complicated political environment and the major challenges Serbia and Montenegro is facing this year, especially regarding the future of Kosovo and the State Union, as you have noted in your report.

With respect to Kosovo's future status, the United States is encouraged by the generally constructive atmosphere that characterized the initial decentralization discussion under the auspices of UN Status Envoy Martti Ahtisaari in Vienna held on February 20-21. We strongly urge leaders from Serbia and Kosovo to continue to engage in the status process in a spirit of real compromise, and to work with Mr. Ahtisaari and the international community to reach a settlement that promotes democracy throughout this region and supports the Balkan's stability and progress toward Euro-Atlantic integration.

With regard to the question of Montenegro's future, we very much welcome the fact that both the Government of Montenegro and the main opposition parties have now agreed to a date for the referendum on independence and rules governing its conduct.

We applaud EU Special Envoy Mirolsav Lajcak for his key role in helping to negotiate these modalities. We also would like to recognize the difficult compromises that both the government and opposition sides had to make in agreeing to them. We now call on both sides to show further leadership by ensuring that their followers rigidly adhere to the referendum rules to ensure a free and fair referendum process.

It is equally important that both sides in Montenegro, as well as the authorities in Belgrade, fully respect the referendum results. In the same vein, regardless of the referendum outcome, we urge the republican leaderships in both Serbia and Montenegro to work cooperatively to ensure the future stability and good relations between the two republics, with full respect for human rights.

We also call on authorities to continue to focus on reform at the State Union level and in both republics, and not to allow the questions of Kosovo and Montenegro's respective futures to distract all attention from the further steps Serbia and Montenegro need to take toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

In this respect, Mr. Chairman, the OSCE Mission in Serbia and Montenegro plays a crucial role. We hope Ambassador Urstad that you will maintain the Mission's focus on reforming the police and judiciary, both of which are key to advancing the Chairman-in-Office's goal of enhancing the struggle against organized crime.

We would also like to express our support for the work the Mission is doing to promote regional judicial cooperation in war crimes cases and in helping Serbia and Montenegro develop the capacity to conduct domestic war crimes trials. We call on governmental authorities to devote sufficient resources to these high priority activities and to develop a strong and independent war crimes investigative service within the police.

We would also like to bring special attention to the fine job the Mission is doing to promote security and stability in South Serbia. We recognize that progress has been made in promoting economic development and in integrating Albanians into state structures, but we call on government authorities to do more in this respect. At the same time, we also urge the Albanian community to work within existing structures and form an Albanian national council as foreseen by existing legislation to promote its interests.

Ambassador Urstad,

The United States shares the concern you have voiced in your report that regional refugee return and reintegration is proceeding too slowly, despite the Sarajevo Declaration target of resolving all issues by the end of 2006. We appeal to all governments of the region to redouble their efforts in this regard, and to promote reconciliation and address real humanitarian problems stemming from the wars of the 1990s.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, to repeat what we and others have said in this venue and elsewhere numerous times before, we once again call upon Serbia and Montenegro to take all possible steps to arrest and transfer to the Hague remaining ICTY-indicted fugitives. If government authorities can show leadership and courage on such difficult subjects as Montenegro and Kosovo's future, they can and must be able to bring Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic to justice. The United States believes that the future of Serbia and Montenegro lies firmly inside Euro-Atlantic structures and institutions. By delivering ICTY-indicted fugitives to The Hague to face justice, Serbia and Montenegro can correspondingly take a promising step in this direction.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.